

## ***Taller de Paz: Workshop for Peace***

### **Project Description**

Created in the summer of 2009, the pilot program of *Taller de Paz* “graduated” forty-three Colombian youth, ages eight to fourteen, from families that were internally displaced by the on-going armed conflict in the country. These youth are *among* the 4.6 million, representing roughly 10% of the overall population, internally displaced peoples in Colombia, which rivals Sudan for the title to the biggest displacement crisis in the world. They are also among the 56,000 internally displaced people that arrive to ramshackle neighborhoods surrounding the capital city of Bogotá every year.<sup>1</sup> *Taller de Paz* is an educational program that was created and designed by four Swarthmore College students, Deivid Rojas '11, Camila Leiva '09, Alex Frye '11, and Andrés Freire '11 as an attempt to break the negative cycles that internally displaced youth in Colombia experience. Our goal is to empower our students by equipping them with the skills to become active advocates of their community.

With the goal of sustainability in mind, we partnered with a Colombian student-led university-based foundation, *Consciencia Social*, whose purpose is to raise awareness within Colombia of the displacement crisis as well as to promote and implement hands-on community-based projects working with displaced peoples. *Conciencia Social* had prior experience working with the displaced population in the neighborhood of Suba and through them we were also able to garner the support of the local municipal government of Suba. Collaborating with this organization has given us an invaluable partner on the ground in Colombia.

Our curriculum last summer employed four different “*talleres*” or workshops; photography, art, English/story-telling, and social justice, in each of which participants learned new technical skills pertaining to the subject matter of the *taller* which they later translated into final projects. These final projects were designed to provoke critical and reflective thought in the participants about themselves, their community, and Colombian society as a whole.

For example, in the photography *taller*, students were given the option of exploring a problematic theme in their communities through photography or film. Many got the opportunity to visit Suba’s city hall, police headquarters, and its streets in order to conduct interviews, of their creation, with the people in power in their community as well as other ordinary citizens. Among the themes chosen by the students for the final projects in the photography *taller* were homelessness, drug addiction, sexual abuse, and inadequate waste disposal.

Last summer all of our students displayed high levels of enthusiasm and commitment for the entire four weeks of the program, which culminated in successful final projects that were later displayed at a graduation ceremony. We were able to take our students on several trips including a nature out, an amusement park, a university campus, and the Colombian presidential palace. Every single student attended the final graduation ceremony. The parents of our students were also very enthusiastic and committed to the project, and volunteered to help in any way they could. We would like to find a way to enable them to become involved in the project in a more integral and formal way.

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<sup>1</sup> Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, “Colombia: New displacement continues, response still ineffective.” Norwegian Refugee Council, 2009. 23 January 2010. <<http://www.internal-displacement.org>>.

Although the project was overall successful, we also experienced difficulties from which we learned a great deal. Working with partners from different backgrounds and perspectives we learned a lot about teamwork and group dynamics, which in the end contributed to the richness of the program. As a result we emerged from the past summer with a strong relationship of mutual respect and commitment with them.

This summer, our goal is to return to Bogotá to continue the work of *Taller de Paz*. We seek to build a long-term relationship, characterized by solidarity, respect, and care, with the community of Suba and our project partners. This will involve a process of both improving and expanding upon the precedent model as well as incorporation new components. Based on the experience we've gained we are reconstructing our curriculum to better fit the empowerment model that we envision considering the conditions our students live in. In addition there will be trainings for our workshop leaders prior to the beginning of the program. We will also improve the accessibility of *Taller de Paz* by moving to a location more central to our target community.

Last summer we were able to have extensive conversations with many of these families and were able to hear first-hand about their experiences of being displaced, the hardships they faced as a consequence, and the continued marginalization they felt within the communities that they were forced to move to. These conversations led to our goal of creating a parent's committee. A parents' committee will serve as a venue for mutual among these displaced families. It will provide the parents with a platform to act together to address the challenges they face as a community. Finally, the committee will serve as an advisory board to *Taller de Paz*, helping plan the curriculum and developing other programmatic aspects of the project. A parent committee will play a vital role in organizing the support of our students' families to guide the expansion of our project and it will enhance the overall experience of the educational program for our students.

A Davis Project for Peace grant would support an organized international student effort to empower displaced Colombian youth to be activists within their communities. The grant money would cover travel and living expenses for five Swarthmore College students (three workshop leaders and two full-time administrators), operating expenses for the program (including food, class materials, and transportation when needed), and equipment costs. We've created two new administrative positions for this summer that will be crucial to the development of *Taller de Paz*. The administrators will be responsible for the daily operations of the program as well as the creation of the parents' committee and other expansion initiatives such as researching and seeking new partnerships.

Our pilot program was a good beginning; we believe it was only the preliminary step in our goal of developing a permanent community-based educational initiative in Colombia with a wide base of support there and in the United States.

Attached please find our proposed budget and letters of support for our return to Bogotá this summer from *Conciencia Social*, the Javeriana University, and the local municipal government of Suba.